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SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 25 August-3 September 1992
Item 12 (f) of the provisional agenda*

TOPONYMIC EDUCATION AND PRACTICE AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Report on coordination of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names with other technical and professional groups

Paper submitted by the United Nations Group of
Experts on Geographical Names**

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1. During the 14th session of UNGEGN in Geneva it was decided to strengthen coordination of UNGEGN with other technical and professional groups. For this end an ad-hoc sub-commission of the UNGEGN working group on evaluation was appointed, with F.J.Ormeling as convenor and Mr Mbika-Mbonguila, Mrs E.Narhi, Mr Park and Mr P.Raper as co-members.

2. This ad-hoc working group decided to make a) a clear proposal as to what UNGEGN hopes to achieve through its cooperation with these other organisations, b) an inventory of the organisations to be contacted for cooperation, and c) a brochure describing the work of UNGEGN, its procedures, which explains the rationale behind its resolutions and recommendations.

3. During the 15th meeting of UNGEGN, in the report of the convenor (WP57), an inventory was made of the organisations that would have to be contacted, and those that were contacted already were listed. The UNGEGN members that attended the 15th meeting were asked to help with contacting the remaining organisations.

4. The International Cartographic Association consented in having a special meeting on the Standardization of Geographical Names at its 1991 international conference in Bournemouth, UK. At this special session Messrs Lewis (UK), Bohme (FRG), Kadmon (Israel) and Ormeling (Netherlands) presented papers.

5. At this international conference of the International Cartographic Association in Bournemouth, UK 1991, it became clear that there are many misconceptions about the work of UNGEGN, and that it would be most useful to distribute brochures about UNGEGN's work amongst UN member states and the scientific community.

6. For the 6th UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names a brochure was designed to publicize the UNGEGN's endeavours. This brochure was sent to UNGEGN chairman Raper, Co-chair Kerfoot, UNGEGN WG on Evaluation chairman Randall and ad-hoc WG co-member Narhi for comments and suggestions. Their welcome and most useful comments were all gathered and applied to the brochure, and a new corrected version was prepared to be discussed in New York.

7. This brochure is added to this paper, and the conference is asked to decide whether this brochure, or a similar text, can serve the aims of strengthening cooperation of UNGEGN with other technical and professional groups.

the results of its endeavours.

Those organisations of professionals actively using (collecting, mapping, studying, broadcasting) geographical names will be contacted, will be provided with documentary material and will be asked to provide some space for the issue of geographical names standardization at their meetings. This will help them to get acquainted with the progress that the UN has made in this field. It will in particular explain the rationale behind the UN resolutions and recommendations in the field of national standardization, the conversion of names between writing systems, the use of exonyms and the agreements that have been reached regarding naming features beyond a single sovereignty (for example transboundary names, ocean and submarine topography names, names in Antarctica and extraterrestrial names).
UNGEGN also intends to familiarize these related groups with the courses, manuals, newsletters and other publications it has developed, in order to share the general body of knowledge that has been developed in this field.
This is all intended to benefit the communication about places!

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INTERNATIONAL STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES (UNGEGN)

Since 1967, the United Nations has served world communications by promoting the standardization of geographical names. Six UN international conferences have been dedicated to practices to help assure that communications about places are accurate.

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INTERNATIONAL STANDARDIZATION of GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES - UNGEGN

The Beginning

For many years, geographers and cartographers recognized that variations in the spelling of geographical names hindered accurate communications within and among nations. In 1959, a group of experts from several nations discussed the topic with UN officials.
Following recommendations, the UN agreed to hold a conference in 1967. The UN also created another body - the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) - to meet between conferences. This is a scientific body, in which geographers, cartographers, linguists, histonans and surveyors cooperate in order to address the aims of UN in this field:

To have one standardized Roman alphabet orthography for each geographical name, that denotes a specific geographic object (country, island, river, region, field, town, mountain, etc.). If this standardized name is transferred to other writing systems, it is the UN's aim to have only one version in each writing system. When this goal is reached, there will be no more confusion about selecting appropriate spellings from various alternatives.

Present confusion

Because different conversion systems are used for example from the Cyrillic alphabet different versions of names emerge. The name of a major Siberian river may be written as Jenissei or Ienissei or Yenisey on

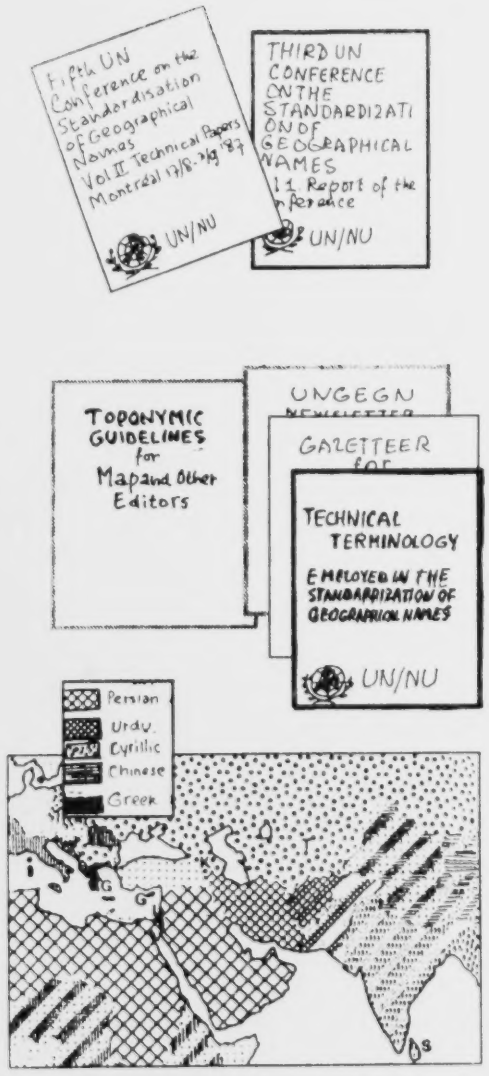
different Roman alphabet maps. As a result it will be difficult to find the name in an atlas index, and inhabitants of different countries will have difficulty in deciding whether they are referring to the same river.

Similarly, the impact on journalists can be significant. Correspondents from different news agencies may use different conversion systems in referring to places. The editors and readers may have difficulty understanding that news about Basra refers to the same city as news about Al-Bassorah. Expensive mistakes are made because various name forms exist in languages written in the Roman alphabet, for instance Capetown, Kaapstad and Le Cap (all names for the same place) or Vienna, Wien, Wenen and Bécs (all referring to the capital of Austria).

UNGEGN policies

What is the UN doing to prevent the confusion of different spellings of names? It has developed an elaborate programme supported by many countries in the world. The programme has the following points:

- stimulate the establishment of national names authorities in member states
- develop national names standardization
- encourage member states to publish national gazetteers (lists of geographical names showing their official spelling and coordinates)
- provide help in establishing national methods for automated processing of names
- provide training courses and manuals for geographic name gathering, processing and treatmen



UNGEGN Publications

- promote development of conversion systems
- provide documentation on conversion systems and gazetteers
- initiate a programme of publishing toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for each UN member state

Present Results of UN programmes

At the Sixth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, in New York 1992, it was stated that national names standardization is being undertaken in over 3/4th of UN member states. National names authorities responsible for national standardization are active in 60 countries. Conversion systems into the Roman alphabet from other principal writing systems have been established: for Cyrillic, Chinese, Amharic, Thai, Greek, Ivrite and Persian in the Arabic script.
The number of UN-sponsored toponymic training courses is increasing. More and more digital geographical names databases are established, and toponymic guidelines have been published for most countries in the Northern hemisphere.

Future Goals

Of course, UNGEGN aims at a 100% coverage, and will continue its effort in that direction. At the same time, however, it intends to strengthen its relations with other technical and professional groups that actively deal with geographical names in their work. By contacting these organisations UNGEGN hopes to improve and strengthen its programme, to get more support, and on the other hand to speed up the dissemination of